

Main Street's Merry-Go-Round

By John K. Haws Jr.

A few years ago, the building that stood on the corner of Center Street and Main Street fell down. It was an old Main Street building that had not been occupied for some time.

One could walk by the building and look through the windows. The floor of the building was gone and all that was left was a drop-off into a big hole. The City had purchased the property and building earlier. Unexpectedly, the building roof tumbled to the ground. It scared all those involved, because it was not expected. It had the possibility of danger to many people. The city lot is now empty and is used for parking¹.

One hundred and fifteen years ago the spot was also empty. It was long before the Cotter Store, or Racker Lumber and Coal Yard, or before the Western Auto. While there was no store, it was a site that all the young men and women in Lehi longed to go to.

It was on that site that between 1895 and 1901 there was a Merry-Go Round or Carousel, whatever you call it. The Children of all ages wanted to come to the spot and ride the decorated horses.

Carousels were not new at the turn of the century. Carousels had been around for some time. Carousel was the term for horse ballets. In 1605, horse ballets were part of fairs on holidays in France and is said to have come from Bulgaria. Costumed Royalty would ride decorated horses

¹ Allred, Cathy. "Lehi City to lose three historic buildings". Daily Herald: January 28, 2009. print.

and perform a choreography dance routine in a circle as part of a festival. The floats, in the festival parades, started having decorated horses and other creatures on the floats, with the royalty riding them.²

By 1745, Michael Dentzel, converted his wagon-making business in German to a carousel-making enterprise. They would craft beautiful animals and mechanisms during the winter months and would then tour the German towns and having their carousels to ride at different venues. Others in Germany and France started creating carousels. The first known recorded steam-powered carousel was created by Thomas Hurst and shown at a Bolton, England New Year Fair in 1861.³

By the turn of the century, there were over 4,000 carousels throughout the United States.⁴ One of these was in Lehi, Utah on the site on Main and Center Street. The Carousel in Lehi was owned by Messers Whipple and Yearance. They would set up the merry-go-round up in the spring and put it away before winter.⁵

Whipple and Yearance would usually have rides available on Fridays and Saturdays for Lehi people to ride.⁶ Imagine the warm summer evenings that couples and families would come to ride the carousel. It was reported that the adults rode the carousel as much as the children.

The Carousel had to buy a business license from the City to run the

² International Museum of Carousel Art. "A Brief History of the Carousel". Retrieved 2008-07-24.

³ Kane, Joseph, Anzovin, Steven, & Podell, Janet. *Famous First Facts*. H.W. Wilson Company, 2006, p.2.

⁴ *Antiques Roadshow*, Spokane, Washington, broadcast 4 August 2007.

⁵ Lehi Banner December 12, 1895 page 4

⁶ Lehi Banner October 3, 1901 page 4

merry-go-round. It was originally set at \$5.00 a year for the license for the ride. In 1902, the City Council raised the license from \$5.00 to \$15.00. It was not reported whether it was because the carousel business was doing large business or whether it was a nuisance and wanted to get rid of it either for the constant noise of the music or the clientele that the carousel brought.⁷

The May 30, 1914 Banner reports that “The Merry-go-round arrives in town Thursday and the kiddies and some that are not are spending all their loose change in riding the horses”.⁸ They also built other novelties on the site like a shooting gallery.⁹ Saratoga also had a Carousel. There are still carousel horses around that were used on the Carousel at Saratoga. Yearance and Whipple also ran a carousel at the State Fair.¹⁰

The Carousel at Lagoon is an example of a historic carousel around here and is on the National Registry. Today, One can still enjoy the ride after 100 years of history and enjoy the circus calliope music and get dazed in going around in the circle. I still like to getting on the pink and lavender ostrich.

I still get the thrill of watching Mary Poppins. I will never forget getting all dressed up in my very best and going to the Centre Theater in Provo to see Mary Poppins with my family. In Mary Poppins, Mary, Bert, and the children ride a merry-go-round, then leave the carousel on their horses to go off on a fox hunt and a horse race. It was a jolly holiday....

⁷ Lehi Banner January 16, 1902 page 4

⁸ Lehi Banner May 30, 1914 page 10

⁹ Lehi Banner November 25, 1896 page 4

¹⁰ Lehi Banner October 1, 1903 page 4

I will never forget one of my favorite musicals, "Carousel". Carousel (1945) was a Broadway musical featuring hit songs such as "If I Loved You" and "You'll Never Walk Alone". The protagonist, Billy Bigelow, is a carousel barker. Shirley Jones is hauntingly in my memory. Yes, carousels are part of our romantic heritage.

Rhea Lewis reminded me that the carnival would come during the Roundup some years where the Legacy Center is. I remember my mother taking me on a date to that carnival. My mother and I rode the tilt-a whirl and the merry-go-round. There was always a carousel. Rhea said that the merry-go-round was always her favorite part of the carnival.

The heyday of carousels ran their course and disappeared from Lehi and many other spots. By the year 2000, it was reported that there was only 150 carousels left in the United States.¹¹

As I ride down Main Street, I imagine the sight of the rotating spectacle on that corner with the lights, music and action of the people of Lehi. I wonder if they had caramel apples.

¹¹ *Antiques Roadshow*, Spokane, Washington, broadcast 4 August 2007.